TURMOIL AT NEW LIFE CHURCH

SHOCK. DISBELIEF. DENIAL.

Haggard takes leave after accusations of gay sex

By PAUL ASAY and DEEDEE CORRELL
THE GAZETTE

The Rev. Ted Haggard resigned Thursday as president of the National Association of Evangelicals after a male escort said Haggard paid him for sex over a three-year period.

Mike Jones: Male escort said his acquaintance with Haggard lasted about three years.

Haggard, senior pastor of the 14,000-member New Life Church in Colorado Springs, also put himself on administrative leave from New Life while a panel of outside church leaders investigates the accusations.

Haggard denied the allegations made by Denver resident Mike Jones, and so far no conclusive evidence has verifiefed the claims. But KKTV reported late Thursday that acting senior pastor Ross Parsley said Haggard has admitted to some of the indiscretions. The church did not say what Haggard admitted to, the station said.

Haggard said in a statement he's stepping aside to let the investigation run its course.

He could "not continue to minister under the cloud created by the accusations made on Denver talk radio this morning," he said in a written statement released Thursday.

SEE HAGGARD • PAGE 7

THE GAZETTE FILE

The Rev. Ted Haggard denied the allegations. "I did not have a homosexual relationship with a man in Denver," he said. "I am steady with my wife. I'm faithful to my wife."

INSIDE

How it evolved

How the allegations against the Rev. Ted Haggard came to the public's attention is its own strange story. **Page 7**

Jones' motive

Accuser Mike Jones said he was tired of Haggard's hypocrisy and hoped the news affects the outcome of Tuesday's election. **Page 7**

National audience

The charismatic Haggard's influence has stretched far beyond Colorado Springs and even into the White House. **Page 7**

In his words

What the New Life Church leader has said in the past about sexual orientation and gay marriage. **Page 8**

ONLINE

Get updates and discuss the Haggard story. **gazette.com**

Church members lean on their faith

"He's a man of honor. But always our faith has been in God and not the minister. He taught us that himself."

MEGAN OASTER – member of New Life Church

By CAROL McGRAW
THE GAZETTE

Telephones rang steadily at the reception desk at New Life Church. The three women answering them said over and over, "Yes, thank you for your prayers."

Members and employees at 14,000-member New Life leaned on their faith Thursday afternoon as they absorbed the news that a man had come forward to claim a long-term sexual relationship with their pastor, the Rev. Ted Haggard.

Some members milling in the coffee shop and elsewhere seemed more mad than sad, calling the allegations an unfounded political ploy to discredit their pastor and defending him as a man of integrity.

But when pressed to talk about what if Haggard really had paid a male prostitute for sex, they said it would not damage New Life Church. Haggard founded the church in his basement in 1984.

"The church is not Pastor Ted," said member Megan Oaster, 26.

Oaster and her husband, Jeremy, a stockbroker, said they have attended New Life for several years, and were waiting for their daughter to get out of ballet class.

SEE REACTION • PAGE 6

TURMOIL AT NEW LIFE CHURCH

REACTION: Church members urged to look ahead

FROM PAGE 1

"He's a man of honor," Megan Oaster said. "But always our faith has been in God and not the minister. He taught us that himself."

Jeremy Oaster said that what makes the church special is the enthusaism and faith of church members. "Everyone likes to attend," he said, "because the teachers, including Pastor Ted, are adamant that we follow what the Bible says, not what we want it to say."

Seth Otterstad, 24, said he recently moved here from California and has attended New Life for about three weeks. He said he would have difficulty attending a church led by a gay pastor. "You forgive, but I'm not sure that he would qualify as a leader," Otterstad said.

But he said he doesn't think he'll have to worry about that. Otterstad, a mortgage lender, had read about the allegations on news Web sites. "I got mad," he said. "They are making this up right before elections to besmirch his name." He added he planned to pray "that it not be true and that it won't sway the elections."

Haggard has favored the proposed amendment to the state constitution that would define marriage in Colorado as a union between a man and woman. The issue is on Tuesday's ballot.

Standing in the foyer, Bible in hand, Brooks Demio noted evangelicals believe homosexual relations are not condoned in the Bible, and that gays could not lead. "But any real church revolves on the Lord," he said.

Demio said he attended New Life in the 1980s and returned to it eight years ago. He thinks the allegations are "political potshots" and that Haggard will weather the controversy.

"It won't hurt his reputation," Demio said. "It will strengthen it."

Later in the evening, Glenn Packiam, a New Life associate worship pastor, spoke to about 200 gathered at the church for choir practice.

Packiam acknowledged the television trucks from Denver news stations in the parking lot and mentioned the allegations against Haggard.

"Ted has flat denied it," Packiam said.

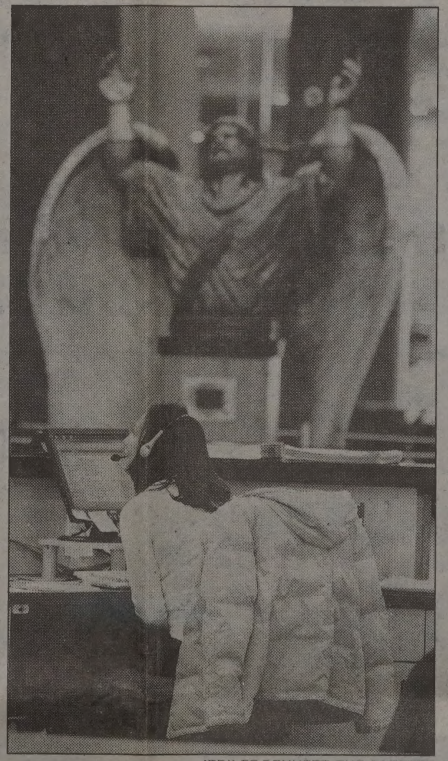
Ross Parsley will be filling in as senior pastor as New Life overseers review the allegations, Packiam said.

The group laughed as Packiam encouraged them to show Parsley "a little more respect" given his current position.

Packiam also encouraged church members to be friendly if approached by members of the media and focus on moving forward.

CONTACT THE WRITER: 636-0371 or carol.mcgraw@gazette.com

Staff writer Anthony Lane contributed to this report.



JERILEE BENNETT, THE GAZETTE

New Life Church employee and member Deborah McDonald said she took many calls Thursday in the lobby of the Worship Center of New Life Church from people supportive of the church.

REACTION | QUOTES

"Ted Haggard is a friend of mine, and it appears someone is trying to damage his reputation as a way of influencing the outcome of Tuesday's election,"
JAMES DOBSON, Focus on the Family

"I did not have a homosexual relationship with a man in Denver. I am steady with my wife. I'm faithful to my wife." TED HAGGARD

"There's some stuff on there (the voice mails) that's pretty damning." MIKE JONES

"The church is going to continue to serve and be welcoming to our community. That's a priority."
CAROLYN HAGGARD – niece of Ted Haggard

"It's fishy. I think people should take note that this is five days before election, and that Ted is proponent of Yes on Amendment 43 and No on Referendum I."
STEVE HOLT – senior pastor at Mountain Springs Church

"I've known Pastor Haggard for a long time, and he's a decent man. That's the last thing he'd succumb to."
DON ARMSTRONG – rector for Grace Episcopal and St. Stephen's Church in Colorado Springs.

"The time is interesting. I would say that probably the male escort and Ted Haggard are the only ones who know the truth of what happened."
NORI ROST – of Just Spirit, a gay and lesbian activist agency and religious-right watchdog

"He definitely knows what he's doing, he's very aware of his appearance. And from what I know he's a very good personal trainer as well."
GREG MONTOYA – editor of Out Front Colorado

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3 TODAY

FILMS

FILMMAKER IN THE COMMUNITY SERIES: "Girl Trouble" at noon, City Administration Building, Suite 102, 30 S. Nevada Ave., 385-7430; "The Great Mother" at 1:30 p.m., The Gazette, 30 S. Prospect St.; 636-0204; both free.

ROCKY MOUNTAIN WOMEN'S FILM FESTIVAL EVENTS: 6:30 p.m. Nov. 3, Gala Celebration, Fine Arts Center, 30 W. Dale St. Screenings begin at 8:30 a.m. Nov. 4 and 9 a.m. Nov. 5, Armstrong Hall at Colorado College and the Fine Arts Center. Three-day festival tickets are $95, one-day is $35 and Gala tickets are $40; 634-5583; www.rmwfilmfest.org.

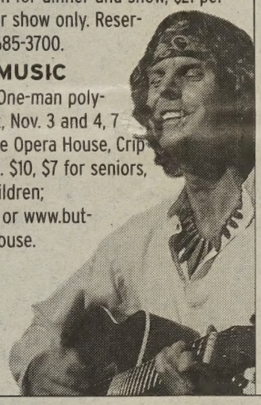
WARREN MILLER'S "OFF THE GRID": Nov. 3 and 4, Pikes Peak Center, 190 S. Cascade Ave., $19.50. Times and tickets, www.ticketswest.com.

FOOD

"THE DINING ROOM": Nov. 3 and 4, presented by the Castaways Dinner Playhouse and Last Minute Players, 5-6:45 p.m. dinner, 7:30 p.m. show, Castaways, 107 Manitou Ave., Manitou Springs. $39.25 per person for dinner and show, $21 per person for show only. Reservations: 685-3700.

MUSIC

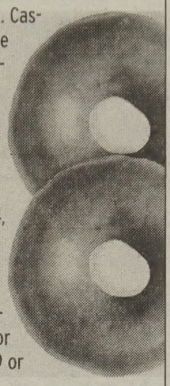
BONES: One-man polyrhythmist, Nov. 3 and 4, 7 p.m., Butte Opera House, Cripple Creek. $10, $7 for seniors, $5 for children; 324-8944 or www.butteoperahouse.com.



4 SATURDAY

ART

EXHIBIT RECEPTION: "BOOK AS OBJECT": 4:30 p.m., Colorado College, Coburn Gallery, main floor of Worner Campus Center, 902 N. Cascade Ave. Performance by exhibited artist Angela Lorenz, free; 389-6606 or 389-6607.



CHILDREN

"TWO DONUTS": 11 a.m. and 2 p.m. Nov. 4, 2 p.m. Nov. 5, Theater at Venue 515, Business of Art Center, 515 Manitou Ave., Manitou Springs. A play for children, $8; 685-4729 or www.themat.org.

MUSIC

WORLD MUSIC SERIES: HUUN HUUR TU: 7:30 p.m., Shove Memorial Chapel, 1010 N. Nevada Ave., free; 531-6333, ext. 1234 or online at ppld.org.

ASLEEP AT THE WHEEL: 9 p.m., Cowboys, 3910 Palmer Park Blvd., $15-$19; 596-1212.

POTPOURRI

DREAMPOWER ANIMAL RESCUE'S EIGHTH ANNUAL "WHISKERS & WINE" FUNDRAISER: 6-10 p.m., Giuseppe's Old Depot Restaurant, 10 S. Sierra Madre St. Dinner, silent auction, guest speakers and more. $50 in advance, $60 at the door; 390-7838 or www.dreampower-arf.com.

WHITE RIBBON CAMPAIGN RALLY: 7 p.m., World Arena, 3185 Venetucci Blvd. The world's largest effort by men working to end men's violence against women, free; 389-6606 or 389-6607.

5 SUNDAY

ART

ARVADA CENTER CELEBRATES 30 YEARS: 1-4 p.m., Arvada Center for the Arts and Humanities, 6901 Wadsworth Blvd., Arvada. Free; 1-720-898-7200.

CLASSES

"SPECIAL CHANNELLING: CHANNEL OF 12": 1-4 p.m., Celebration Conscious Living Store, 2209 W. Colorado Ave. $55 in advance, $65 at the door; Dove, 205-6525.

"FLOORING SOLUTIONS": 1 p.m., Home Depot, 102 N. Academy Blvd., 573-7000; 7120 N. Academy Blvd., 531-6400; 5660 E. Woodmen Road, 266-5165; and 2250 Southgate Road, 471-0054, free.

MUSIC

RECYCLED PERCUSSION: 7:30 p.m., Colorado College, Armstrong Hall, 14 E. Cache La Poudre St. General admission tickets are $20, free tickets for CC ID holders. Tickets available at 902 N. Cascade Ave.; 389-6607.

POTPOURRI

ADOPTION FAIR: 2:30-5 p.m., Woodmen Valley Chapel, 290 E. Woodmen Road. Several agencies representing domestic and international adoptions as well as foster adoptions, free; 388-4953.

6 MONDA

CLASSES

"FRANKLIN DELANO ROOS AND THE VOICES OF WOR 9:30-11:30 a.m. The role of FD trayed by Richard Marold, $2 and registration: 633-4991 or lar.org.

"TOOLS FOR DIVINATION: ING THE COSMIC REFLECT RUNES": 7-9 p.m., Celebrati scious Living Store, 2209 W. Ave. Presented by designer Courtney Barry. Donations a 634-1855.

FOOD

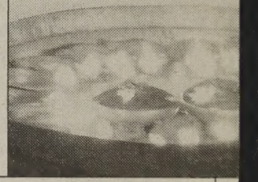
51ST ANNUAL PILGRIM'S DINNER: 6 p.m., East United Church, Fellowship Hall, 1505 ment St. Pre-Thanksgiving h and music by the Colorado S dren's Chorale. Donations a 634-2801.

LECTURES

"PRESIDENTIAL POWERS POST 9/11 WORLD": 7 p.m. College, Gates Common Roo of Palmer Hall, 1025 N. Casca sented by presidential schol nin, free; 651-3001.

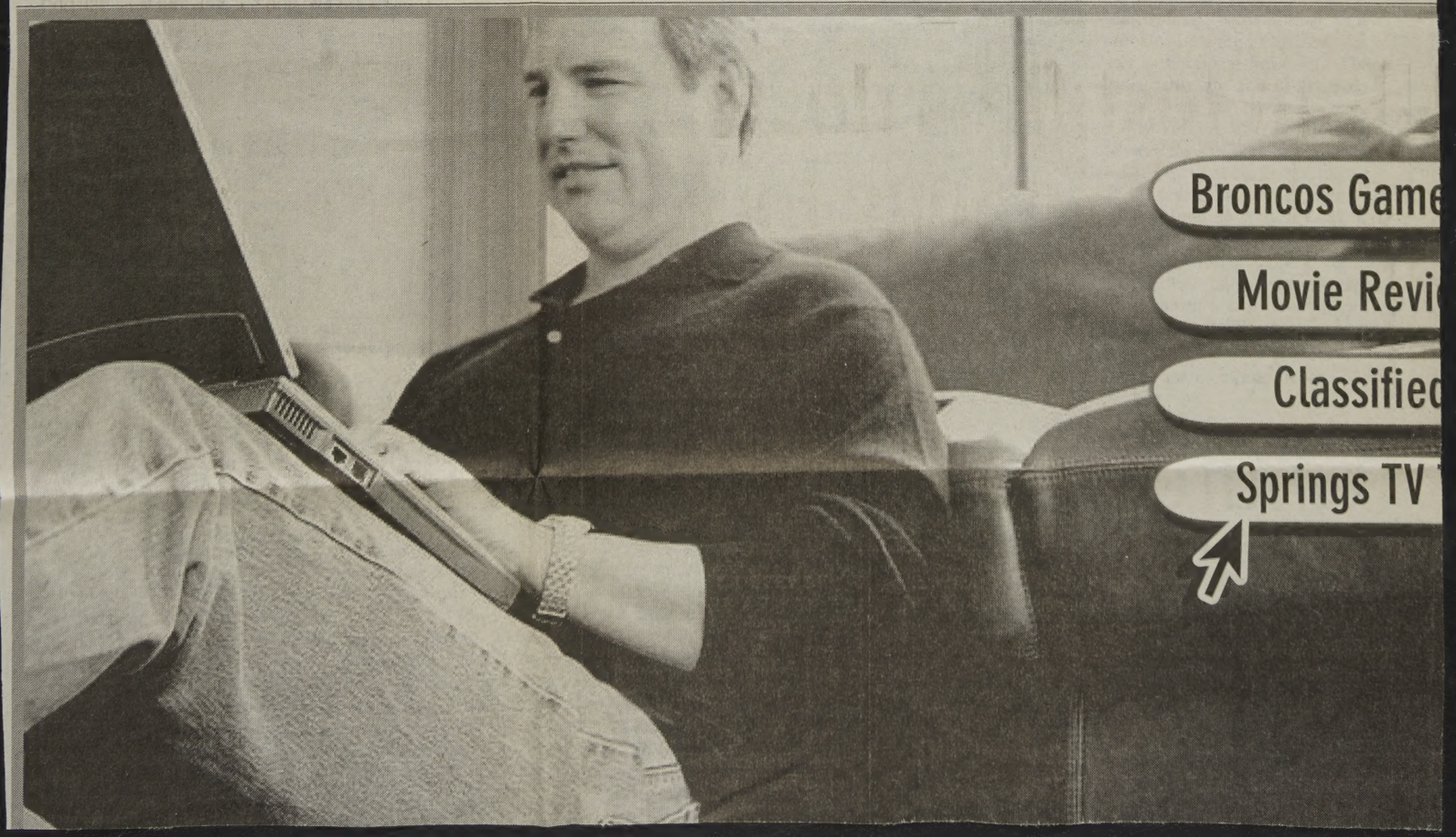
POTPOURR

CELEBRATION OF DIWALI FITR: 6 p.m., Colorado Colle Hall, main floor of Worner C ter, 902 N. Cascade Ave. To raise awareness of South As free; 389-6606 or 389-6607.



MORE CALENDARS: See Sports and Business on Sunday, Food on Wednesday, GO! and Out There on Friday, and the Life section on Monday, Tuesday, Thursday, Saturday and Sunday.

ONLINE: For even more events, go to gazette.com and click on Metro/State



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Turmoil at New Life Church

Media coverage itself is part of the Haggard story

By ANDREW WINEKE
THE GAZETTE

Media coverage of the allegations against New Life Church pastor Ted Haggard quickly became an important part of the story as it unfolded Wednesday and Thursday.

Denver NBC affiliate KUSA/Channel 9 said it learned two months ago of the allegations by Mike Jones, a Denver man, that Haggard had paid him for sex over a three-year period.

KUSA assistant news director Tim Ryan said the station attempted to verify Jones' story but didn't have enough to go forward.

"We were doing research and looking for more corroboration before we took the story to another level," Ryan said.

But Wednesday morning, Peter Boyles, a talk show host on Denver station KHOW (630 AM), aired an interview in which Jones, who was not identified on the air, said he had a sexual relationship with "one of the biggest religious guys in the country."

KUSA, knowing it was Jones on the radio, decided to go ahead with its story Wednesday night, provided Haggard would respond on camera.

"It became public and we decided we would do the story if Pastor Haggard responded to it, and he did," Ryan said. "We presented it as such: There's an allegation, and there's a response."

Haggard was interviewed by KUSA on Wednesday night, denying the accusations, and the story was aired on Channel 9's 10 p.m. newscast.

Boyles had Jones on the air again Thursday morning, this time using his and Haggard's names. On the show, Boyles said his first contact with Jones was an Oct. 27 e-mail, which he didn't read until Oct. 30. Boyles said the e-mail didn't use Haggard's name.

The only evidence produced by Jones was an envelope with a Colorado Springs postmark that Jones said contained a letter sent to him by "Art." Jones claimed "Art" was Haggard. The claim remains unverified.

KUSA's Ryan said the station's reporters had heard at least one voicemail that Jones claims came from Haggard.

Ryan acknowledged publicizing allegations like these was still tricky, but said a public figure of Haggard's stature is subject to greater scrutiny.

"I don't think there's much about the story that's clear-cut," he said. "No matter how you look at it, this is a difficult story."

The coverage drew condemnation from James Dobson, founder of Focus on the Family, and other Haggard supporters.

"It is unconscionable that the legitimate news media would report a rumor like this based on nothing but one man's accusation," Dobson said in a written statement.

Supporters had organized a rally in support of Haggard but canceled it at the request of New Life Church officials.

Kelly McBride, an ethics faculty member with the Poynter Institute for journalism, said news organizations need to meet a high standard before running such stories.

"If it were true and you could somehow demonstrate a public interest in reporting it, then I think it's a responsible journalistic act to do," McBride said.

Since the congressional page scandal around former Florida Rep. Mark Foley erupted, McBride has heard from dozens of reporters investigating rumors of other homosexual affairs by public figures and politicians. "Every state has a case like this," she said.

The avalanche of stories on similar subjects risks reinforcing the image that gay sex is deviant and reinforces an environment of prurience in the media, McBride said.

"The difficulty is, if your lead is 'Pastor resigns amid scandal,' you've made the scandal true without reporting it," McBride said. "It's not to say that I disapprove of the reporting, it's just that you have to go through a journalistic test."

Pastor's influence reaches around globe

By R. SCOTT RAPPOLD
THE GAZETTE

The Rev. Ted Haggard speaks to thousands from the pulpit on Sundays, but his influence extends far beyond the arenalike New Life Church.

He has become the public face of evangelical Christians here and the most prominent evangelical in the nation.

From the beginning, he has seen his work as a battle, which expanded over the years from a struggle over souls in Colorado Springs to a struggle over the direction of the nation.

A 1978 graduate of Oral Roberts University, he grew up on an Indiana farm in a strongly religious family. In 1984, he visited Colorado Springs, where his father-in-law had returned, and spent a night fasting and praying high on Pikes Peak.

They moved here, and he founded New Life Church in his basement the following year. He spent the early years waging "an invisible war to claim Colorado Springs for Christ," he told a magazine in 1993.

His brand of religion, with clapping, dancing and a band with guitars, saxophones and drums proved popular, and "Pastor Ted" proved a charismatic leader. By 1992, the nondenominational church had 3,000 members and a 75,000-square-foot church.

A key enemy in his struggle was homosexuality, which he called "immoral."

"If a person chooses a certain activity, they need to be willing to face the consequences," he told The Gazette in 1991, speaking against a proposed anti-discrimination law.

Evangelicals felt a new spirit of influence when George W. Bush was elected, and Haggard, elected president of the evangelical association in 2003, was at the forefront, with frequent appearances on cable news programs and in the national media, speaking on issues of morality — including homosexuality. He has written several books, ranging from tales of spiritual struggle to his most recent, a cookbook.

He has been a globe-trotting emissary, traveling to Mexico City in August 2005 to meet with Venezuelan President Hugo Chavez. He met with Israeli Prime Minister Ariel Sharon in 2004.

And frequently, he met with Bush, meeting with the president or his advisers each Monday, according to a 2005 story in Harper's Magazine.

The magazine wrote, "No pastor in America holds more sway over the political direction of evangelicalism than does Pastor Ted."

Television journalist Tom Brokaw used New Life to illustrate America's evangelical movement in a recent NBC special, and Christianity Today, a Christian magazine with 150,000 subscribers, featured Haggard on its November cover, proclaiming him "A New Kind of Evangelical."

Most recently, he was among the group of sponsors of a statewide ballot measure to ban gay marriage.

He and his wife, Gayle, have five children.

Haggard signs his e-mails to New Life members with "I love being your pastor."

CONTACT THE WRITER: 476-1605 or scott.rappold@gazette.com

Accuser wanted news out before election

By DEEDEE CORRELL
THE GAZETTE

Mike Jones advertises himself as a man who will not disappoint.

"Voted best massage therapist and personal trainer for the years 2000, 2001 and 2002 by readers of the community newspaper Out Front Colorado," his "Massage by Mike" Web site reads. "Former state bodybuiding and powerlifting champion."

The self-proclaimed prostitute also could turn out to be the man whose allegations — if true — could bring down one of the most powerful evangelical Christian leaders in the country.

Jones spoke to The Gazette on Thursday, describing the business relationship he claims to have had with Ted Haggard, founder of New Life Church.

It began, he said, about three years ago when he got a call from a man named Art. At first, Jones said, "Art" claimed he was from Kansas City.

Then the calls started coming from Colorado Springs. Six months ago, he spotted Haggard on television. "'My God, there's Art,'" he said.

Haggard's middle name is Arthur.

Jones claims to have proof of the relationship in the form of "various voice mails that he has left me."

That should be enough, he said.

"Even if the voice mails didn't even mention sex — let's just say that — why would he be contacting me, period?" he said to radio host Peter Boyles.

Jones' motive? Haggard's hypocrisy — especially in light of the initiatives on which Coloradans will vote Tuesday, Jones said.

"He's standing up in front of millions of his followers," he told The Gazette. "And then he's doing this behind their backs."

He said he was tired of Haggard's anti-gay messages and acknowledged he hopes the news affects the outcomes of Amendment 43 and Referendum I.

"I don't know if it's going to change any votes or not," he told Boyles. "What I want people to think about when they step in the voting booth, is, 'If I were a gay person, what would I want out of life?' And you would want the same things everybody else wants."

Jones said he didn't intend the news to break so close to the election.

He approached KUSA two months ago, but it didn't want to go with the story immediately. "They actually wanted more proof," he said.

Jones is well-known in Denver's gay community and popular with readers of Out Front Colorado, a newspaper that focuses on the gay, lesbian and transgender community, said Out Front editor Greg Montoya.

"He definitely knows what he's doing, he's very aware of his appearance," Montoya said. "And from what I know, he's a very good personal trainer as well."

Jones is known for getting results with his weightlifting students, Montoya said.

His Web site makes it clear he offers other services as well.

"If you like a strong muscle man to bring pleasure to you, then please call me," it reads.

It lists his measurements — 18-inch arms, 47-inch chest, 32-inch waist — and his rate, $70 per hour.

At Charlie's, a gay bar in Denver, customer John Locke studied Jones' "Massage by Mike" advertisement in the paper Thursday night.

"I know this community pretty well, and he's not somebody that I would say is a well-known person," he said.

But he suspects Jones is telling the truth, he said. "I don't believe this guy is making it up. He's not that stupid."

Locke said he doesn't appreciate the things Haggard and other evangelicals have said about gays.

"I just have a real struggle with people that call themselves Christian that can be so hate-filled in their rhetoric," he said.

To a neighbor at the Capitol Hill condominium complex where Jones lived for several years, it was clear he was gay — and possibly working as an escort.

"He gave massages to people; he had his unit set up so they could go into his room and get a massage," said Rosemary Shearer of Denver. "He had regular clients. I know one was a lawyer."

She never saw any women visit him, she said, except Jones' mother.

Staff writers Tom Roeder, Perry Swanson, Andrew Wineke and Paul Asay contributed to this report.

HAGGARD: Accuser says he learned of pastor's real name 6 months ago

FROM PAGE 1

He said he might talk about the issue later and will seek "both spiritual advice and guidance" until then.

Parsley will take the helm of the church until Haggard's status has been resolved.

The Haggard story dealt the evangelical world its most serious shock since the 1980s scandals of televangelists Jim Bakker of the PTL Club and Jimmy Swaggart of the Assemblies of God.

Haggard heads Colorado's largest megachurch and has been an influential leader in the national evangelical movement — a movement some say was instrumental in getting President Bush re-elected in 2004.

Time Magazine named him one of the country's 25 most influential evangelicals, and Harper's Magazine called New Life "the most powerful megachurch in America."

At Haggard's gated Briargate home, the lights were on Thursday evening, but the occupants draped blankets across the windows when it grew dark. No one answered repeated calls to the callbox at the gate. Haggard did not return telephone messages from The Gazette.

One woman driving by stopped and said to the media gathered outside, "I hope you all aren't giving our pastor a hard time. He's a good man."

At the church — within view of the Haggard home — church members expressed optimism that the allegations were false, but said that even if they were true, the church would go on.

"We'd be shocked if it were true. But our faith is based on God, not one minister," said Megan Oaster, 26.

Others were angry. "This upsets me because they besmirched his name for an election," said new member Seth Otterstad. "I'm going to pray about it."

The allegations surfaced days before the Tuesday election, when two significant gay rights issues come up for a vote in Colorado. Amendment 43 would define marriage as between a man and a woman, and Referendum I would give same-sex couples certain legal rights. Haggard has been an outspoken supporter of Amendment 43.

Jones, the male escort from Denver, said his acquaintance with Haggard — whom he knew as "Art" — lasted about three years, with Haggard calling him every month or so and paying him for sex. Haggard's middle name is Arthur.

Jones said the encounters typically lasted less than an hour.

"It was just encounters," Jones told The Gazette. "There was no emotion involved."

Jones also said he saw Haggard use methamphetamine.

Jones said he learned Haggard's real name about six months ago while watching a History Channel program on which Haggard was interviewed. Jones began researching Haggard and discovered his church's positions on same-sex marriage.

"I got to tell you, I started getting pissed," he said.

JERILEE BENNETT, THE GAZETTE

The 14,000-member New Life Church will be led by the Rev. Ross Parsley, New Life's associate senior pastor, until the Rev. Ted Haggard's status is resolved.

Jones approached Denver news outlets with the story about two months ago, but first spoke publicly Wednesday in an interview with Peter Boyles, a talk show host on KHOW (630 AM).

Wednesday evening, television station KUSA in Denver aired an interview with Jones, in which he named Haggard as his client. Haggard denied the charges on KUSA that evening.

"I did not have a homosexual relationship with a man in Denver," Haggard told KUSA. "I am steady with my wife. I'm faithful to my wife."

Jones says he has two voice mail messages and a letter from Haggard, which he released to KUSA.

The television station hired Richard Sanders, a voice identification expert from the University of Colorado at Denver, to compare the voice mail messages with samples of Haggard's voice.

KUSA reported that nine of 12 words were "perfect matches" and that Sanders planned to issue a report today.

Jones acknowledged the political sensitivity of his allegations. "He is being the hammer, and the gay movement is his nail," he told Boyles.

Several religious leaders defended Haggard before his NAE resignation Thursday afternoon.

"It's fishy," said the Rev. Steve Holt, senior pastor for 3,500-member Mountain Springs Church. "I think people should take note that this is five days before the election, and that Ted is a proponent of yes on Amendment 43 and no on Referendum I."

James Dobson, founder of Focus on the Family, said the media were to blame.

"It is unconscionable that the legitimate news media would report a rumor like this based on nothing but one man's accusation," Dobson said.

"Ted Haggard is a friend of mine, and it appears someone is trying to damage his reputation as a way of influencing the outcome of Tuesday's election — especially the vote on Colorado's marriage protection amendment — which Ted strongly supports."

The Rev. Donald Armstrong, rector of Grace Episcopal and St. Stephen's Church, said he's known Haggard for more than two decades and knows he's not gay.

"I've known pastor Haggard for a long time," he said. "That's the last thing he'd succumb to."

Greg Montoya, editor of a newspaper that focuses on Denver's gay, lesbian and transgender community, Out Front Colorado, said rumors about Haggard had circulated for years through Denver's gay community. Michael Rogers, head of the gay activist Web site Proud of Who We Are (www.proudofwhoweare.org), said he thinks Jones is telling the truth.

"I'm just looking at history," Rogers said. "But I don't know a lot of people who step down from those positions if there's not something behind that smoking gun."

Local gay spiritual leaders say they've never heard rumors that Haggard was gay.

"I feel a lot of sympathy for Ted," said Nori Rost, head of Just Spirit, a gay rights advocacy group in Colorado Springs. "Having been a pastor, you live in a fishbowl anyway. It must be very painful for Ted and his family."

Bryant Adams, state Republican Party communications director, said the matter was between Haggard and his accuser.

"Some gay prostitute goes on the radio and says he's had some type of relationship with Ted Haggard," Adams said. "I think you call into question where the source is coming from.

"I'm not commenting on this," he added. "We don't have anything to do with Ted Haggard. We don't talk with his group. There's no need for us to."

At New Life and NAE, officials were reluctant to talk. NAE Chairman Roy Taylor said in a written statement he was now the organization's acting leader and that the organization will release an official statement on Haggard today.

At New Life, a board of overseers — four pastors not connected with the church — will investigate Haggard and determine his fate: The pastor could be reinstated, disciplined or fired.

"People need to be patient and allow this process to unfold as it was designed to do," said Parsley, the acting senior pastor.

The overseers met Thursday to determine how to proceed, said Haggard's attorney, Martin Nussbaum. He said there is no timeline for the investigation.

"We are on a journey here, not an errand," he said.

Gazette reporters Pam Zubeck, Tom Roeder, Anthony Lane, Andy Wineke, Dave Philipps and Perry Swanson contributed to this story.

TURMOIL AT NEW LIFE CHURCH

IN HAGGARD'S WORDS

The Rev. Ted Haggard has spoken many times about homosexuality. Here are some of his comments:

May 2004, in a message on the National Association of Evangelicals Web site

"Today, homosexual couples are marrying in the Commonwealth of Massachusetts. The crisis concerning marriage is now a real and present danger to our society. ... These sacred institutions (marriage and family) are the foundational building blocks of our society, and now more than ever, we need to cry out to God for His powerful intervention."

August 2004

"They're (evangelicals) going to determine the election," he said, referring to the 2004 presidential race. Few conservative candidates for national office pass through Colorado Springs without consulting with Focus on the Family founder James Dobson or Haggard. The two represent a large body of believers – and voters – who push politicians to address issues such as same-sex marriage and abortion.

March 1993

"I vote a straight ticket," Haggard told his congregation after urging them to use the power of politics to make the world more moral amid talk of Amendment 2, which would have barred laws specifically protecting gays from discrimination.

November 1993

During journalist Bill Moyers' PBS documentary examining Colorado's Amendment 2, he talked with Haggard, who explained that he believed "homosexual behavior is immoral."

January 1991

"We don't believe this is a discrimination issue. If a person chooses a certain activity, they need to be willing to face the consequences," he said. "We would never want racial discrimination or discrimination against people in a situation beyond their control. Homosexuality is not a situation beyond their control. It's a behavioral choice."

February 1991

Calling homosexuality immoral, Haggard said: "We think sexuality is designed by God and that is it is good. It's for joy, marriage and reproduction. God created sexuality to be part of mankind, but if we abuse it, we have to be willing to face the consequences."

Source: The Gazette articles, unless otherwise noted.

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